Meeting Notes
NORTH DELTA IMPROVEMENTS GROUP
Wednesday, December 3, 2003
9:30-11:30 at Jones & Stokes (2600 V Street)

ATTENDANCE LIST:

Margit Aramburu	Delta Protection Commission
Joe Balkan	KCRA
Craig Crouch	County of Sacramento Department of Water Resources
Suzanne DeLeon	California Department of Fish and Game
Bill Dutton	US Bureau of Reclamation
Larry Eastteam	KCRA
Mike Eaton	The Nature Conservancy
Chris Elliott	Jones & Stokes
Patricia Fernandez	California Bay-Delta Authority
Dan Gwaltney	County of Sacramento Department of Water Resources
Tom Harvey	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Walter Hoppe	Point Pleasant
Gwen Knittweis	California Department of Water Resources North Delta
Gil Labrie	DCC Engineering
Roger Lee	California Department of Water Resources & Reclamation Board
Monica Martin	California Department of Water Resources North Delta
Sara Martin	Jones & Stokes
Steve Mello	NDWA and Reclamation District 563
Mark Novak	California Department of Health Services
Ryan Olah	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Curt Schmutte	California Department of Water Resources North Delta
Jim Smith	East Bay Municipal Utilities District
Jeff Stuart	NOAA Fisheries
Don Trieu	MBK Engineers
Chuck Vogelsang	California Department of Water Resources
Keith Whitener	The Nature Conservancy
Daniel Wilson	Delta Protection Commission
Collette Zemitis	California Department of Water Resources North Delta

HANDOUTS

- Meeting Agenda
- Draft Description of Proposed Alternatives

1. INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME – Gwen Knittweis and Curt Schmutte, DWR

Gwen Knittweis welcomed everyone to the meeting and facilitated a round of introductions. Curt Schmutte then offered a recap of the history of the North Delta project. The origin of the concept for an improvements project in the North Delta area occurred in the late 1980s with a desire to improve water quality and conveyance as well as flood control through modifications to the cross-channel and some levee setbacks. The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) designed a set of alternatives for which a draft environmental impact report was written in 1990, however the project was halted in deference to the CALFED Program. The original project was also very expensive which may have hindered its ability to be implemented. With the formation of CALFED in the late 90's, improvements in the North Delta were proposed once again and actions previously proposed in the 1990 Draft EIR were reflected in both the Delta Cross Channel/Through Delta Facility Studies (DCC/TDF) and Flood Control and Ecosystem Restoration Improvements outlined in the August

2000 CALFED Record of Decision. (The DCC/TDF assumed most of the potential area conveyance potentials). Meanwhile, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) acquired lands in the North Delta area adjacent to the Cosumnes Preserve for ecosystem restoration and multi-use purposes such as flood control, which provided great opportunities for well-integrated flood control and ecosystem restoration. This led to the current project, focusing on flood control and ecosystem restoration on McCormack-Williamson Tract and Staten Island, and the project team is striving to "achieve both goals in a synergistic way".

Curt went on to explain some of the key issues and problem areas for the North Delta staff.

- **100-Year Floodplain** – many stakeholders have expressed their desire that the project not affect the 100-year floodplain and encourage growth in the area, yet improvements are necessary in order to protect area life and property. Cooperation and compromise amongst all stakeholders will be crucial to overcoming this issue.
- **Dredging** – although a traditional solution to flooding problems, dredging does not have a desirable effect on the ecosystem or on water quality, requires continued maintenance, and faces uncertainty in the ability to obtain permits.
- **Property Constraints** – in light of the current political and funding climate, additional area land acquisitions are unlikely, therefore there is a primary emphasis on modifications to McCormack-Williamson Tract and Staten Island, which provide very substantial opportunities in themselves.
- **Exotics** – the project team is very sensitive to the fact that there are many invasive species in the Delta area. Any modifications made for either flood control or ecosystem restoration purposes should deter exotics and promote native species.
- **KCRA Tower** – KCRA and TNC are working closely to make sure the transmission tower remains safeguarded.
- **Vector Control** – An important topic at the last State of the Estuary conference was mosquito population control as the West Nile Virus has been steadily spreading. The creation of wetlands by the North Delta project would provide important habitat for native species, however it would also create more habitat for mosquitoes, so the project team is working to address this concern.
- **Budgetary Constraints** – Since this project is funded out of the general fund, finances are very tight. To help avoid substantial up-front costs, the project could be phased. This could be beneficial as well, as adaptive management could be used to guide subsequent phases.

2. DEBRIEF ON UC DAVIS SCIENCE PANEL – Collette Zemitis, DWR

Collette Zemitis announced that the first of three science panel meetings was convened on November 13, 2003 to review the conceptual ecosystem restoration alternatives, and provide critical feedback early in the design process. Collette gave a PowerPoint presentation summarizing her presentation to the Science Panel and illustrating some of the ideas that came out of the meeting.

In general, the Science Panel was supportive of the project and thought the project had enormous potential. The Panel recommended greater emphasis on ecological restoration including consideration of a greater range of ecological restoration options and greater specificity to the

ecological objectives. They advocated investigating floodplain only and tidal wetlands only restoration options in addition to combined alternatives. The Panel introduced the possibility of diverting the Mokelumne River through McCormack-Williamson Tract. The Panel thought a Mokelumne River side channel through the Dixon property was unnecessary to facilitate flooding and provide habitat. The Panel predicted riparian forest would likely develop naturally on the Dixon property (and McCormack-Williamson Tract floodplain).
After the PowerPoint presentation, she opened the floor up for questions.

Q: What does **"maximize disturbance"** mean?
A: Collette responded that nature does not exist in a steady state and thrives on chaotic events, like flooding: "when we say we want to maximize disturbance, it means we want to encourage change and dynamic situations – for example, allow the river to meander within McCormack-Williamson Tract.

Q: As far as constructing an avulsed channel on McCormack-Williamson and realigning the Mokelumne river are concerned, would it be possible to **leave the river in its current alignment and let the avulsed channel be a flood channel**?
A: Collette explained that the realignment idea is a new idea that was born out of the science panel meeting, and that the project team will look at that alternative.

Q: **It appears that flood control is being de-emphasized** in the project in favor of a heavier focus on ecosystem restoration.
A: Curt responded that DWR will maximize both flood control and ecosystem restoration benefits through the North Delta project. He takes it as a sign that the project team is striking a balance between the flood control and ecosystem restoration because those interested in flood control think the project is too eco-centric while those interested in ecosystem restoration think it is too focused on flood control.

Q: What other tasks were assigned to the science panel? **Will there be a flood control science panel?**
A: The science panel will meet again in February to review revised ecosystem conceptual ideas and generate recommendations. The panel has an ecological emphasis and will not review flood control recommendations.

Q: Will the analysis of alternatives include flood control **benefits versus cost**?
A: Gwen answered that the purpose behind the alternatives screening matrix that the project team has designed is to make that comparison.

3. DRAFT DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES – Gwen Knittweis, DWR

Gwen distributed the Draft Description of Proposed Alternatives handout, and explained that the project team is now working to incorporate the science panel recommendations and prepare a technical alternatives development document. The goals of the flood control component of the project are to lower the flood stage at Benson's Ferry to 16.5' and at New Hope to 12', as well as to address the surge effect through McCormack-Williamson and to not cause any increase in downstream stage levels.

Gwen then described the four flood control alternatives and provided some of the technical rationale behind them. Through hydraulic modeling, the project team has discovered that levee setbacks

create unacceptable increases in downstream flood stage. To address these, the project team is considering side detention basins, which will be most effective at the northern end of Staten, farthest away from the influences of tidal action. Other benefits of locating basins farther north on Staten include better topography (therefore less pumping required) and soils conditions.

The project team is looking into the potential for project phasing; however, this can only happen if project phases can be designed to be hydraulically neutral.

Daniel Wilson noted that in Appendix A-1 of the draft alternatives description, it states that sedimentation is expected to continue. Based on that information, he stressed that if a dredging alternative is proposed, it should include a maintenance component. Gwen then opened the floor for questions.

Q: How will the project team deal with **seepage** from the inside of the detention basins?
A: Curt answered that DSOD defines the levees surrounding detention basins as dams. DWR is lobbying to exempt these levees from that classification, but in any case these levees will be much stronger than a typical levee and will be able to withstand interior pressure without sustaining any damage.

Q: How will the detention basins be drained?
A: Gwen responded that weirs and pumps will be used. The detention basins will be placed at the end of Staten that has experienced the least amount of subsidence, to ensure the least amount of reliance on pumps possible.

Q: Are detention basins considered to have **ecosystem benefits**?
A: Gwen the detention basins have limited potential for ecosystem benefits. They could, however, create opportunities for subsidence reversal. Another meeting attendee mentioned that there could be some negative benefits associated with detention basins because of fish stranding and the ultimate pumping of water out of the basins.

Q: There is talk that the status of delta smelt is being reconsidered. Is there a chance that the regulatory constraints of dredging may be loosened?
A: Ryan Olah responded that it would be very unlikely, as dredging still causes problems for anadromous fish, water quality, and dissolved oxygen levels.

4. HYDRAULIC MODELING UPDATE – Gwen Knittweis, DWR

Gwen informed the group that DWR is writing a technical document containing all of the modeling results to date, and that there is still more hydraulic modeling to be done. Walt Hoppe recommended modeling more flood hydrology than just the 1997 flood event. Sacramento County and MBK staff noted that the County is developing synthetic hydrology for the watershed including the 100-yr and 200-yr events. DWR agreed to model the 100 yr hydrology and other hydrologies (such as the 200-yr) to the extent possible within budgetary resources. Don Trieu pointed out that, for hydrologies other than the '97, all of the modeling assumptions will need to be reevaluated, including those for the likelihood of levee breaks upstream.

5. CEQA DOCUMENT PROCESS – Chris Elliott, Jones & Stokes

Chris Elliott described the plan for the environmental document preparation that will kick off in

early 2004. It will be a CEQA only document, but with NEPA-friendly format and nomenclature. The purpose of this will be to facilitate an easy transition of the document into an Environmental Impact Statement in the future when a federal permit is required. The also means that each alternative will receive equal environmental analysis, and that a preferred alternative will not be identified until the Final Environmental Impact Report. Margit Aramburu asked if there will be a cost analysis and analysis of the likelihood of obtaining the necessary funds as a parallel document. Curt Schmutte responded that a cost analysis will definitely be done, but the team is not yet certain what form it will take.

6. MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS AND WRAP-UP

- Gwen stated that there is some hope that the project will receive some additional funding from the Federal Highway Administration and/or CalTrans as flooding in the North Delta has historically caused substantial damage to I-5.

- Mike Eaton noted that the project team is shaping goals and analyzing effects 20-25 years in the future and mentioned that this seems very shortsighted.

7. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday, March 3, 2003 at Jones & Stokes.